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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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SUBJECT: ADVISER DISCUSSES ELECTION AND THE RETENTION OF MARTIAL LAW

REF: DACCA 3618

1. MOUDUD AHMED, PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER FOR TELEGRAPH AND TELEPHONES AND AN INFLUENTIAL POLITICAL ORGANIZER FOR PRESIDETN ZIA, ADDRESSED A NEWS CONFERENCE JUNE 12 TO DISCUSS SOME OF THE MORE CONTROVERSIAL ASPECTS OF PRESIDENT ZIA'S ELECTION VICTORY JUNE 3. MOUDUD ANALYZED, INTER ALIA, THE REASONS FOR ZIA'S VICTORY, THE LEVEL OF VOTER PARTICIPATION, THE MARGIN OF VICTORY AND THE NECESSITY OF MAINTAINING MARTIAL LAW. IN ALL BUT THE LAST SUBJECT, IT SEEMED TO BE THE "OFFICIAL" ANSWER TO OSMANI'S AND OTHERS' COMPLAINTS.

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2. MOUDUD REFUTED REPORTERS' SUGGESTIONS THAT ZIA'S VICTORY HAD BEEN MORE A NEGATIVE VOTE AGAINST THE AWAMI LEAGUE THAN A POSITIVE VOTE FOR ZIA. RATHER, SAID MOUDUD, THE BANGLADESH PEOPLE HAD VOTED FOR ZIA AS A POSITIVE EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE IN HIS LEADERSHIP AND HIS PROMISE TO ESTABLISH A STABLE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM. THE ELECTION HAD ALSO GIVEN THE PEOPLE A CLEAR CHOICE:

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"THERE WERE THOSE WHO HAD BEEN IN POWER (THE AWAMI LEAGUE) AND THERE WERE THOSE WHO ARE IN POWER AND THE PEOPLE COULD JUDGE THE PERFORMANCE OF BOTH." THE VOTERS HAD REJECTED THE BAKSAL REGIME, HE SAID; HOWEVER, AND TO THIS EXTENT, THERE WAS A NEGATIVE FACTOR.

3. MOUDUD DEFENDED THE OFFICIAL VOTER PARTICIPATION FIGURE OF 53.34 PERCENT BY COMPARING IT WITH THE LEVELS IN OTHER RECENT ELECTIONS. HE CLAIMED THAT THERE HAD BEEN A 55.09 PERCENT PARTICIPATION IN 1970 AND A 55.62 PARTICIPATION IN 1973. TO THE SUGGESTION THAT THE TURN-OUT APPEARED MORE LEISURELY AND LESS CROWDED THAN PRE-VIOUSLY, MOUDUD POINTED OUT THAT THIS TIME THERE HAD BEEN ALMOST 6,000 MORE POLLING STATIONS THAN IN 1973. HE ALSO SAID THAT SINCE 1954, WHEN ONLY 37.19 PERCENT PARTICIPATION HAD BEEN RECORDED, THE PEOPLE HAD LEARNED THE VALUE OF VOTING. AS FOR THE LARGE VICTORY MARGIN OF 76.63 PERCENT, MOUDUD OBSERVED THAT VICTORY MARGINS HAD TRADITIONALLY BEEN LARGE IN EAST BENGAL.

4. MOUDUD GAVE SEVERAL SPECIFIC REASONS WHY MARTIAL LAW MUST CONTINUE UNTIL AFTER THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN DECEMBER. HE SAID THAT AT PRESENT MARTIAL AAW WAS THE SOURCE OF AUTHORITY AND THE CONSTITUTION WAS SUB-ORDINATE. TO WITHDRAW MATTIAL LAW NOW WOULD "CREATE A VOID". EXPLAINING, MOUDUD SAID THAT IF THE CONSTITUTION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

WERE IN EFFECT NOW, IT WOULD BE MANDATORY TO HOLD PAR-LIAMENTARY ELECTIONS BY AUGUST AS THE CONSTITUTION STIP-ULATED THAT ELECTIONS MUST FOLLWO WITHIN 90 DAYS OF THE DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT. FURTHER, THE CONSTITUTION STATES THAT THE NATIONAL BUDGET MUST BE PLACED BEFORE THE PARLIAMENT, BUT IN FACT THE BUDGET MUST BE APPROVED BY JULY. HENCE, SAID MOUDUD, ONLY MARTIAL LAW COULD MEET THIS "SPECIAL SITUATION".

5. ON A RELATED MATTER, MOUDUD REFUTED ALLEGATIONS THAT IN SOME CASES THE VOTE COUNT HAD BEEN EXCESSIVELY RAPID. THE QUICK COUNTING OF VOTES, HE SAID, HAD BEEN SPEEDED BY NEW TELEPRINTERS WITH PUNCHED TAPES AVAILABLE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THIS ELECTION. MOUDUD ALSO SAID THE COSTS OF THE CAMPAIGN HAD BEEN EXTREMELY LOW. HE ALSO DENIED CHARGES OF POLLING BOOTH IRREGULARITIES, INCLUD-ING INTIMIDATION OF THE OPPOSITION'S POLLING AGENTS.

6. COMMENT: MOUDUD, ONE OF THE MOST ARTICULATE MEMBERS OF ZIA'S ENTOURAGE, WAS APPARENTLY GIVEN THE ASSIGNMENT TO REFUTE OSMANI'S EARLIER CHARGES (REFTEL) OF VOTING IRREGULARITY. WHETHER MOUDUD HAS DONE THE JOB CON-

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VINCINGLY IS PROBABLY A MOOT POINT AS THE VARIOUS ALLE-
GATIONS HAVE NOT GAINED MUCH PUBLIC SUPPORT.
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